From Article to Action: Using Mindfulness Practices

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The article by Erwin, Robinson, McGrath, and Harney (“It’s Like Breathing In Blue Skies and Breathing Out Stormy Clouds”: Mindfulness Practices in Early Childhood) shares a marvelous blend of evidence, insights, and applications. It highlights the positive impacts and cost-effectiveness of several forms of mindfulness in a second grade classroom. Here are some additional ideas for where the content of this article might take you next.

Do you work directly with young children and families?

• Take a look at Table 4 which shares the strategies Corrine (one teacher in the article) used to infuse yoga in her early childhood classroom routines. Which of these strategies might work in your setting?

• Table 1 highlights possibilities for using mindfulness practices with diverse children in a variety of ways. One huge advantage of mindfulness approaches (e.g., yoga, meditation) is that they incorporate strong visual modeling, provided by both the instructor and the other children. At the same time, mindfulness practices can provide excellent opportunities to build the vocabulary of self-awareness and self-efficacy. Think about the possibility of incorporating mindfulness practices like breathing exercises in a classroom with children who are dual language learners (DLLs), and make a list of those words/phrases to support the participation of those children as well as their vocabulary development.

• If you have been able to implement mindfulness in a learning setting with children, it might be important to share the practices with families. The article has some examples, but think about other ways in which you might introduce families to mindfulness practices. A family-child yoga demonstration? Brief text message to families about breathing techniques and how to use them?

Do you provide professional development as an instructor or faculty member?

• Table 1 reminds us that mindfulness may be a new concept for families that requires explanation. Ask students/participants to read the article, and then prepare a simple, one-page overview of the concept of mindfulness and the benefits when used consistently with young children. The summary should include both the evidence for mindfulness and examples of how it might be implemented in home, program, and community settings. An alternative could be to develop a plan for how they would introduce mindfulness in a setting with which they are familiar (e.g., child care program, Pre-K classroom).

• The article underscores the ways in which mindfulness practices are effective for children who are diverse. For some children, this may require some additional planning and thought. Ask students/participants to look for evidence and then consider how mindfulness practices might be modified for children with significant intellectual challenges? Or children with significant physical challenges? Or with children with sensory challenges?
Mindfulness practices may be new for some personnel working with young children. If you wanted to have a conversation with personnel about incorporating mindfulness practices, this article would be a great place to start. Here's one idea. Comb the article for examples of the benefits (e.g., improved ability to self-regulate on page 4; increased body control, enhanced self-confidence, and enhanced self-direction and focus for Jamal on page 10; decreased classroom disruption on page 13) and make a bulleted list of those examples to share.

Tables 2 and 3 share information about programs, organizations, and other resources related to early mindfulness practices. Review and explore this information with an eye toward how you might support the use of mindfulness in a program you support. For example, are there organizations in your community that focus on mindfulness practices (e.g., yoga centers)? Might there be individuals in those locations who could support adults in the program to learn about and use mindfulness practices?